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IRISH SURNAMES; THEIR PAST AND PRESENT FORMS.

By JAMES MACGRADY.

THE family names of a people constitute a portion of their history, and are, as it were, monuments which serve to verify or correct it. When such names are perpetuated in their original forms, or nearly so, their value for this purpose is the greater. Even when changed, more or less, by the lapse of time, it may still be possible to trace them back to their origin, and thus restore their historical importance. In Ireland numerous examples occur of very ancient names, still borne by families, nearly unaltered from the oldest forms found in the pages of our Annals; while others have undergone the most singular transformations; the same name being often found in different parts of the country completely disguised by corrupt pronunciation, by provincial accent, or even by translation into English.

Irish surnames, are, for the most part, of very ancient origin, and had all, no doubt, their several meanings in the language of the people; though it may now be difficult in all cases to ascertain these with certainty. Still, a careful comparison of the names, as they now exist, with those which occur so copiously in our old M.S. histories, and a due attention to the traditional knowledge preserved among the people themselves, will throw considerable light on the subject. In the present paper it is intended to offer a few observations on one or two classes of names, the origin of which can be found in a very remote period of Irish history:—afterwards, the subject may be pursued further.

The early history of Ireland, like that of other countries, is a strange combination of truth, exaggeration, allegory, and downright fiction. Though truth be overloaded, however, it is still to be found beneath the superincumbent mass. It would be rash to deny the existence of famous personages, merely because mysterious or incredible exploits are ascribed to them: and although the traditions of a people, highly imaginative, and fond of the marvellous, represent Finn Mac Cool, and his comrade hunters and warriors, as giants, and attribute to them works exceeding even the strength of giants, we are not justified in asserting that there never were such persons in existence. Mythic characters are to be found in the early history of every country; but the judicious historian of the present day inclines to the opinion that these were real individuals, remarkable for some great quality, and whom tradition has invested with a supernatural glory. In Ireland, besides the authority of tradition and of authentic history, we find the very names themselves, celebrated in those early times, transmitted to the present day, so little changed that they can be readily identified.

To begin with the semi-fabulous heroes of the Ossianic tales:—These national epics of our Celtic Homer, celebrate the exploits of a number of warlike hunters, the chief of whom was Finn Mac Cool;

—Finn, the son of Comhal. His father's name, 'Comhal,' is pronounced in Irish as if written Cowal, or Cool. Now we have still in Ireland the patronymic O'Comhail, (pronounced O'Cooil) and its Anglicized form Coyle. But further, in another branch of the Celtic family, the Welsh, we find a surname of very ancient origin, which seems identical with this, viz; Howell. From it have arisen the modern names Hoyle and Hoole; and by prefixing the usual Welsh particle *ap*, (equivalent to our Irish *mac*,) have been formed the names Powell, (Ap-Howell,) Pole and Poole. Moreover, we have, in Irish, diminutive forms of patronymics produced by the addition of *an* or *in*, as terminations to radical words. Cuilleán, (whence O'Cuilleáin, abridged to Cullen, and Anglicized Collins,) is a diminutive which bears the same signification as the patronymic of the Royal family, Guelph or Welf,—that is, equivalent to the Latin *Catullus* or the English word, *Whelp*. From Comhal or Cool, however, a diminutive might be formed, nearly the same in sound, if not in signification:—at all events there are several such in Irish. Now in Welsh, it is possible that from Howell was formed, in like manner, the diminutive Howlin or Howlyn, still known as a family name in the county Wexford; and this, according to some, may be identical with the present Welsh name Llewelyn. In a paper in the last number of this Journal, (page 42,) it is stated that the Norman-looking appellation of Fitz-Howlyn, Lord of Tuscard, was that which became modified into the name of the Mac Quillans of the county Antrim. If so, the preceeding argument would trace the whole series of names, both in Welsh and Irish, up to the remote period represented by Finn Mac Cool. The opinion, that Mac Quillan is an equivalent of Mac Llewelyn, is also held by one of our leading archaeologists.—The name Finn, or O'Finn has descended as a family name; but it is not probable that it is in any way connected with that of Finn Mac Cool. The epithet *finn* or *fionn* is one descriptive of a personal peculiarity, signifying *fair* or *fair-haired*, and has, therefore been applied to numberless individuals.

Macpherson, in his version of Ossian's poems, gives Trenmor as the name of Comhall's father, the grandfather of Finn: more properly Treanmhar, pronounced Treanwar. From this has descended, very possibly, the Irish family names Treanor, and MacCreanor (Mac Threanmhair, which is pronounced MacHreanwar, or MacChreanwar.) This name is often met with in the North of Ireland. A song which the writer frequently heard sung there, when a child, and since then, even as far south as the Queen's County, had for its burden, "My beautiful young *Treanor* O!" Battersby's Ecclesiastical Directory mentions that the present parish priest of Kilshery, county Tyrone, is the Rev. Thomas Treanor.

The bard Ossian, (in Irish *Oisín*,) has left undoubted traces of family descent. The name Cussen, Cushin, or Cushion occurs in the county Limerick, as well as in other parts of Ireland. In the western part of the county Wexford is a place called Cushinstown, and in another part of the same county is a second whose name is written Ballymacushion, pronounced Ballymacusheen: this is nothing more than "the town of Mac Ossian," the town of the son of Ossian. A family-name borne still by persons in the same neighbourhood, is written Cousins, but called by the people Cuzzeen: this

seems to be merely another form of the same word. Oscar, the name of Ossian's heroic son, is no longer heard in Ireland as a personal name; but in Sweden it is still borne by the King, in common with many of his subjects. In the north of Ireland, however, we meet the name McCosker or McCusker, which is unquestionably McOscar. In the county Wexford it is called Coscar after the manner of abbreviation which prevails in the south: there, too, as in various other localities, it is Anglicized Cosgrave.

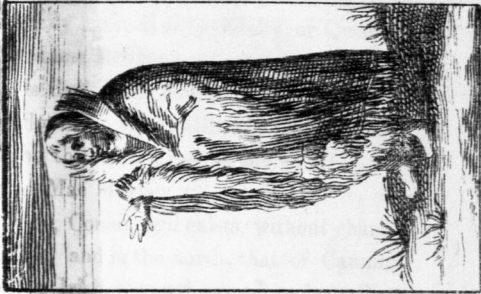
One of the companions of Finn Mac Cool was Caoilte Mac Ronain, who is described as living to an advanced age. The name Caoilte is still perpetuated in the family name Keelty, Kielty, or Queelty: and the name Ronan is, in like manner, represented by the surname Ronayne.

Among the characters described in the Ossianic ballads is Goll Mac Moirne, the great rival of Finn, and the Ajax of the Irish warriors. The present family name of McGill, (in Ulster written Magill,) seems to be Mac Goill, i. e., the son of Goll, Goill being the oblique case of the word Goll:—and Moirne is represented by the northern surname Murney or Mac Murney.

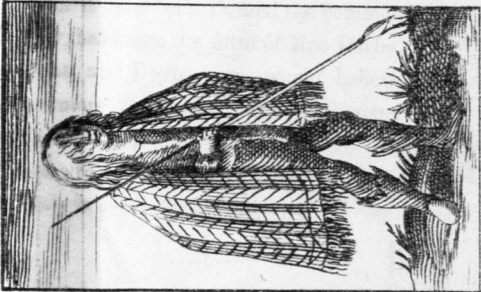
The Thersites of Ossian's heroes was Conan Maol. This name, Conan, still exists, without change, in Kilkenny. In Connaught it has assumed the form Cannon, and in the north, that of Canning. Cannon, however, may be merely a diminutive of Con, another Irish personal name: at least Scott uses it as such in his 'Rokeby,' when he says of O'Neill:—

Conan More, who doomed his race
For ever to the war and chase,
Forbade, with deadly curse and scorn
To plough the land or sow the corn.

The character in the old Irish poems, who corresponds with the Paris of Homer, is Diarmuid O'Duibhne, who carried off Graine, the daughter of the monarch Cormac, from her husband, Finn Mac Cool. His name Diarmuid is heard to this day, perfectly unchanged in Irish; while, in English, it is variously rendered Dermott, Darby, and even Jeremiah. From it has been formed the common family name Mac Dermott, which, in the neighbourhood of Carlow, has taken the form of Mac Darby. The surname O'Doin or O'Duin, now written and pronounced Dunn and Doyne, some would believe to be identical with O'Duibhne; but, as in the case of Finn, it is more likely to have been derived from a personal epithet *donn*, which signifies *brown*, or *brown-haired*. The names Divenny and Divin, however, are common in the north of the county Tyrone, and are, no doubt, the true modern representatives of O'Duibhne, the pronunciation of which is precisely in accordance; namely, O'Divny.



The Wild Irish Woman.



The Wild Irish man.